

## Lab to shed light on search for plutonium

By Nancy Mayer  
STAFF WRITER

LIVERMORE — Questions about an expanded search for plutonium in the soil at Big Trees Park will be answered at a workshop tonight for the neighbors of Lawrence Livermore Laboratory.

Livermore Lab scientists will be at the Holiday Inn in Livermore from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. to talk about their final draft of a plan to dig for 282 soil samples at the park, located a half-mile west of the national security lab at Charlotte and Kathy ways.

Tonight's workshop marks the end of a public input process that began last spring. Around 220 individuals and agencies offered opinions on the plan.

The final document was released 12 days ago, when the lab mailed executive summaries to 1,200 area residents and placed a full copy on display at the Livermore Library. The changes mostly involve increased numbers of samples, including sub-sampling at smaller vertical intervals in a single sample location.

If the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency gives its OK, the lab will start col-

lecting soil samples by Monday, and finish before the September opening date of nearby Arroyo Seco Elementary School.

By analyzing samples from specific locations at varying depths, lab scientists hope to find out whether there is more plutonium in the soil than the trace amounts detected by the Energy Department in 1991 and confirmed in further sampling by the U.S. EPA in 1993 and 1995.

They also hope to find out how the plutonium got there: Was it carried by

wind or stream, or trucked in when the park was landscaped?

State and federal health officials have said the amounts detected in the park are well below regulatory standards for a residential area. But finding out how the plutonium got into the park might shed light on whether other parts of the city might also have been contaminated, the officials said.

The lab is widely considered the source of the contamination. Plutonium is a radioactive metal used in nuclear bombs.

## Beamlet has new life at Sandia

### Livermore lab's laser moving to New Mexico

By Jason Montiel  
STAFF WRITER

LIVERMORE — Beamlet is about to say bye-bye.

The huge prototype Lawrence Livermore Laboratory laser with the cute name will soon be dismantled and taken to Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico, where it will take on a new life in other research.

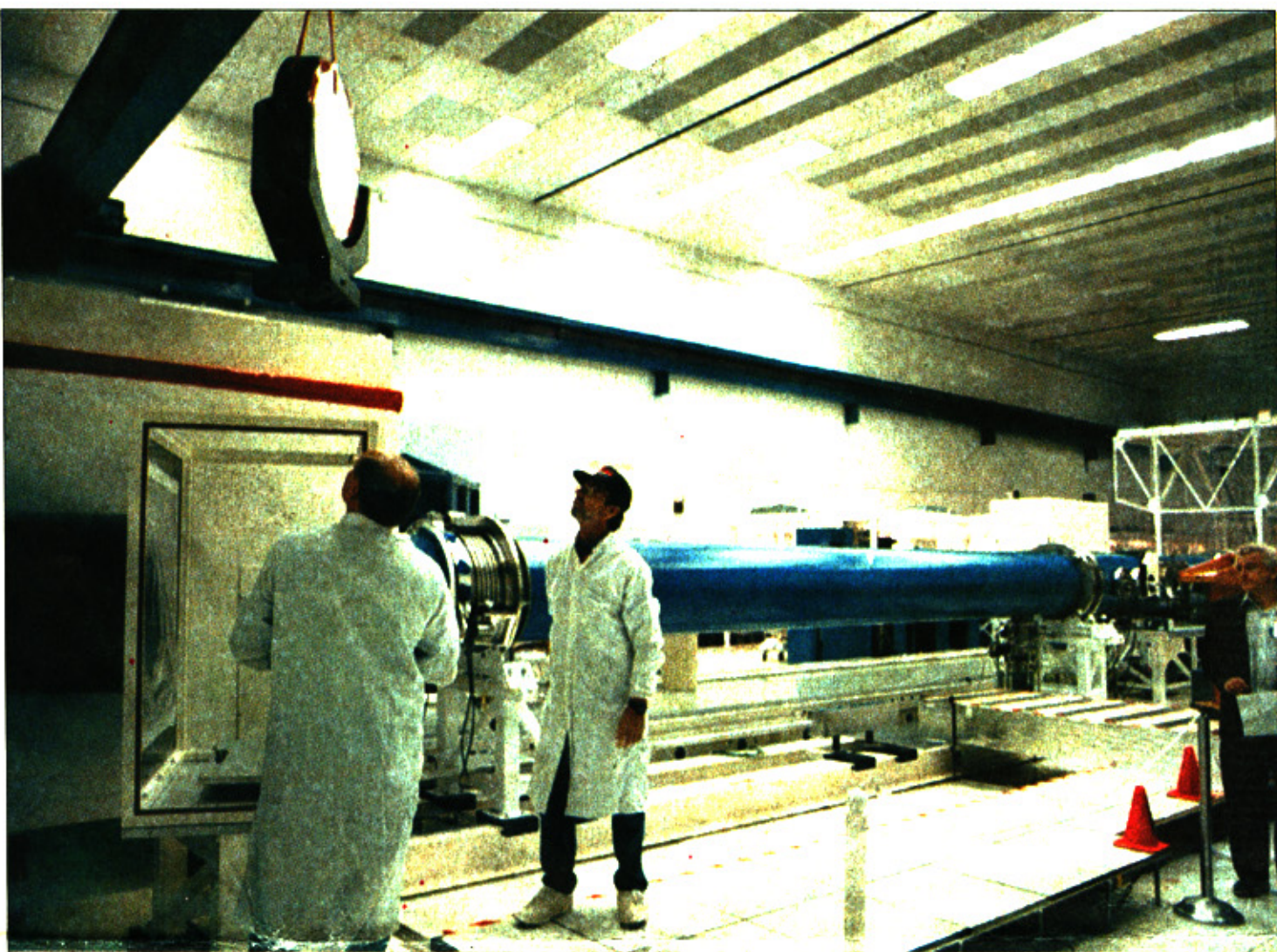
The 100-foot-long Beamlet was built at the Livermore lab four years ago to test laser technology that will be used in the gigantic \$1.2 billion National Ignition Facility laser project now under construction at the lab.

American and French scientists gathered Tuesday beside Beamlet to bid adieu to the laser during a ceremony where workers removed a large focusing lens in preparation for the move, which is set to occur over the next six weeks or so.

"This is a marvelous use of taxpayers' money," said Jeffrey Quintenz, manager of the inertial confinement fusion program at Sandia in Albuquerque, N.M. "All of this equipment is worth millions of dollars and it will be re-used."

Quintenz estimates Sandia is saving anywhere from \$5 million to \$10 million by obtaining Beamlet parts. He estimated the laser will be up and running in Albuquerque in about a year.

The \$30 million Beamlet was used at the Livermore lab to study laser focusing, energy and power. Howard Powell, Livermore's program leader for laser science and technology, said Beamlet provided proof that technology to be used in the NIF project will in-



*The \$30 million Beamlet was used at the Livermore lab to study laser focusing, energy and power.*



Technicians Tom McWilliams and Ron Wing use a crane (above) to lift the main diagnostic focusing lens out of the Beamlet laser at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. Howard Powell (left), program leader for laser science and technology, speaks during the ceremony.

JIM STEVENS — Staff photos

deed work.

Lab officials say the stadium-sized NIF project is significant because it will help the Department of Energy maintain the safety and reliability of the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile. French scientists also used Beamlet to test tech-

nology that will be used in a large laser project to be built in France.

In Albuquerque, Beamlet will serve as a bright source of X-rays to capture images of the

plasmas produced by Sandia's Z machine.

Quintenz likened Z machine research to studying the light coming from a light bulb in an attempt to determine what is

inside the bulb. He said the addition of Beamlet will give scientists a chance to conduct experiments similar to taking pictures of the filament in the light bulb.